



What Do We Need?

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by Kathleen McNamara

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Introduction

All animals affect their environments. When a worm burrows into the soil, it changes the soil. When herds of elk eat the trees in the wilderness, they have an effect on the forest. All living things are part of the environments in which they live. Of all living things, humans affect the environment most. Sometimes the effect is good. Sometimes the effect is bad.

Things Always Change

Carmen was used to the open field near her house. She would often walk past it with her mother on their way to the park. One day they noticed that something was different. Huge earth-moving machines were digging up the field, and workers were all around.



||| Carmen saw that there was a new fence. On the fence a large sign said “Keep Out.”

Carmen asked her mom, “What’s going on? Why can’t we walk in the field anymore?”

||| **New School**

Carmen’s mom explained that a new school was being built. Many new families had moved into town. Now the old school was too small.

||| New families moving into the area meant that Carmen might have some new friends. It also meant that new homes would be built. Houses would stand where now there were open fields.



||| “In fact,” Carmen’s mom said, “the very spot where our own house sits was once an area where a big forest grew. You see, one environment was taken away. Then our own neighborhood replaced what used to be there.”

||| **The Old Factory**

Carmen’s mother added that the park wasn’t always a park, either. A huge factory with big smokestacks used to sit there. She said, “The factory was harmful to the environment because the smoke caused pollution.”

||| She explained that when the park replaced the old factory, people planted trees and bushes. So where only a dirty factory used to be, there was now a park. There was a place to play. There was a place for wildlife to return to the area.



Landfills

Carmen's mom said that humans affect the environment in many ways. She said, "Think about all of the trash we throw out every week. Where do you think it goes?"

Carmen knew about the landfill that collected all of the trash. "What happens if the landfill runs out of room?" she asked. Her mom said that the recycling program in town would help keep that from happening.

Carmen and her mom continued toward the park.



||| Carmen's mom said, "Do you know that place north of town where your dad takes you rock hunting? There used to be a neighborhood up there when I was a little girl."

||| Carmen was surprised. "What happened to it?" she said.

||| "Well, there used to be a lot of flooding near here," said her mom. "So a dam was built to hold back the floodwater when we have heavy rains. That neighborhood was in the area that's used for holding the floodwater."

||| "What happened to all of the people and the houses?"

||| "The people moved into new neighborhoods. The houses were torn down. The old neighborhood was set aside as a flood plain. Things change all the time, Carmen."



Change Isn't Always Bad

"I don't think I like change," said Carmen. "I want things to stay just the way they are."

Her mom smiled. "But if things never change, they never get better, either, do they?" Carmen thought about that. Her mom was right.

Meanwhile, the two had arrived at the park. Carmen could not imagine a factory there.

"What happened to the people who worked in the factory?" she asked.

"They work in a new factory." Carmen's mom pointed to a big building in the distance.



"That's where Dad works!" said Carmen. There were no smokestacks. It was a modern building that looked very clean and quiet.

Her mom smiled at her. "There are better ways of doing things now. We can have factories that don't pollute as much. They're safer, too."

Carmen and her mom sat together on the park bench to rest.

"Maybe change isn't always such a bad thing," said Carmen.

Think and Write

1. What is one way that you can reduce the waste that goes into landfills?
-  2. Explain how too much rain can cause a river to overflow if there is no dam to hold the water back.
-  **3. Descriptive Writing** Write about a construction project that you have seen. Describe its purpose.

Hands-On Activity

Town History Look in the library or on the Internet. Find out what your town looked like 50 years ago. What existed in the spot where you live now?

School-Home Connection

Feeling Change Ask an older family member how he or she felt when a building replaced a field or a forest. Then ask how he or she feels about it now.

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